

# THE GULL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 103 NO. 3 SUMMER 2019



## OAKLAND CHOOSES ITS CITY BIRD: THE BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON

BY ILANA DEBARE

**O**akland selected the Black-crowned Night-Heron as its official City Bird in May, thanks to a campaign initiated by third-graders who were inspired by the heron rescue work of Golden Gate Audubon Society. Students at Oakland's Park Day School lobbied for two years—an eternity for nine-year-olds—to designate the night-heron as their city's official bird.

CONTINUED on page 3

Black-crowned Night-Heron.  
Jerry Ting







An excited student celebrates the City Council's resolution.

## BIRDS ARE NATURAL EDUCATORS

BY CINDY MARGULIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**I**t's long been my premise that birds are ideal educators. They're attractive, fascinating, charismatic, and capable of feats humans cannot quite muster.

Want to teach geography? Bird migration is just the ticket! Planning a lesson in ecological carrying capacity? Surveying for birdlife will indicate the vitality of almost any terrestrial ecosystem. Having a hard time motivating students to appreciate the relevance of math challenges? Focus them on observing the fish that our

SFBayOspreys are bringing in, and they'll indulge in data analysis like hungry chicks dig into a fresh fish meal.

What about cultural history? Well, birds have been admired in every human civilization: appearing on countless coins, flags, and stamps, just for example. When you're teaching art, feathered beings will be brilliant in any medium. Want to learn music? Mozart drew inspiration from his pet Starling! Are you teaching social studies? It's worth emphasizing, that the earliest Audu-

bon activists were staunch suffragettes who cared deeply about gender equity—and about protecting colonial waterbirds.

This spring we learned that even politics and government studies can be facilitated by winged nocturnal squawking professors with blood-red eyes. Those enthusiastic Park Day School third-graders proved it with the way they tirelessly manifested their concern for so many herons striving to raise their families in the heart of Oakland. Their devotion to helping those doppelganger dinosaur babies, who shriek like velociraptors but, given the opportunity and habitat grow to become so very distinctive, led the kids to develop their own muscles of empowerment, giving their campaign the finesse and endurance to succeed. They made a mini film, created a petition, wrote letters, made art and produced a literal arcade of awareness in their schoolyard. They lobbied and advocated until, finally, their efforts were crowned with success.

What these remarkable young people achieved is definitely valuable for the herons' future, but it's also invaluable for the young people themselves. Because Black-crowned Night-Herons inspired them, they learned how to translate compassion into legislation in their own community.

In addition to these wonderful kids, many people help us protect Bay Area birds and their habitats every day. It's uplifting to champion wildlife in a community that understands how much birds mean to the ecosystem, as well as how much they matter to all of us.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### Annual Membership Meeting

July 18, 6:30-7:00 p.m.  
Northbrae Community Church  
941 The Alameda, Berkeley  
Annual Membership Meeting to take place before the July 18 Speaker Series. Join us for refreshments and to hear Executive Director Cindy Margulis discuss Golden Gate Audubon's recent accomplishments and plans for the future.

#### Coastal Cleanup

September 21  
MLK Jr. Shoreline Park, Oakland  
Join us for California's largest volunteer day. Coastal Cleanup Day is about more than picking up trash. It's a chance for Californians to join people around the world in expressing their respect for oceans and waterways and to demonstrate our desire for clean water and healthy marine life.

#### Volunteer Opportunities: Burrowing Owl Docent Training Brown Pelican Survey

September TBD  
Help introduce the public to the adorable Burrowing Owls that winter along the East Bay shoreline or join an important community science project monitoring Brown Pelican populations. Watch for updates or email Noreen at [nweeden@goldengateaudubon.org](mailto:nweeden@goldengateaudubon.org)

#### Travel with GGAS 2020

US, Australia, Brazil, Costa Rica and Mexico  
See the birds of the world with us! Trips help fund GGAS and our conservation and environmental programs. Trips for every kind of birder and every level of budget. Spaces are limited and trips fill quickly. Make your plans now. <https://goldengateaudubon.org/travel-with-ggas-2020>.



## CITY BIRD CONTINUED from page 1

They launched their drive after learning how Golden Gate Audubon had partnered with the Oakland Zoo and International Bird Rescue to save young herons that tumbled onto city streets from downtown nesting trees.

"The babies have been falling out of trees, and we wanted to help them not fall onto the concrete," said Chase Taylor, 9, one of the heron-loving students.

Oakland is home to a large rookery of Black-crowned Night-Herons, wading birds with dramatic midnight blue and white adult plumage and bright red eyes. Colonial nesters, they historically bred at Lake Merritt and near the Oakland Estuary. But in recent years they had begun nesting in thick ficus trees in Oakland's downtown and Chinatown.

The street trees were a less-than-optimal choice. Without any cushioning understory, unfledged chicks who fell risked broken bones or death from exposure and traffic. Golden Gate Audubon took up their cause in 2014 after a much-publicized incident in which poorly timed tree trimming left young herons stranded on the ground.

The collaboration of GGAS, the Oakland Zoo and International Bird Rescue rescued over 100 vulnerable young night-herons and Snowy Egrets from Oakland's streets in 2016 and 2017.

The Park Day third graders were already studying birds as part of their science curriculum when they heard about the rescues. The school invited GGAS Executive Director Cindy Margulis to explain the herons' plight.

"We asked the kids, 'What can we do to help?'" said their teacher Devin Homme. "They came up with ideas like, 'What if it became a famous bird in Oakland?' and 'What if we talked to the government?'"

The students launched an online petition and made a video about Oakland's night-herons. They met with Oakland Council Member Dan Kalb.

"I'd heard of the bird before but didn't know it had special significance to Oakland," Kalb recalled. "I asked them, 'Do other cities have official birds?' It turns out a lot of them do."



Cindy Margulis

Black-crowned Night-Heron champions on the steps of City Hall.

***The students launched an online petition, made a video, and met with Oakland Council Member Dan Kalb.***

In fact, Golden Gate Audubon has played a lead role in convincing other Bay Area cities to designate official birds, most recently the Osprey in Richmond and the Barn Owl in Berkeley. San Francisco chose the California Quail and Alameda named the Snowy Egret as their official birds even earlier.

But like many democratic processes, naming an official bird takes time. Students made repeated lobbying trips to City Hall. Third-graders became fourth-graders. Fourth-graders became fifth-graders. Their petition grew to over 2,000 signatures. Artist Lea Zalinskis, who'd already created a new library card for Oakland featuring the night-heron, taught the third-graders how to make puppets to help their campaign.

Meanwhile, Golden Gate Audubon worked with Oakland planners and two real estate developers to attract night-herons to nest in safer spots along Lake Merritt when numerous rookery trees were going to be

removed for new housing. The relocation effort—designed by heron experts with BCNH decoys, recordings of night-heron calls, and formerly-used nests as attractants for the birds—remains a work in progress.

Finally, on May 21, the night-heron came up for a City Council vote. Both young and old heron lovers gathered with signs and colorful paper heron puppets. When the vote passed unanimously, puppets waved and voices cheered.

"The Black-crowned Night-Heron is a perfect bird for Oakland," said GGAS's Margulis. "This gorgeous bird is celebrated in the art and culture of five continents where the species occurs. Yet this hardy urban survivor now faces serious risks from climate change. It embodies the value of local wetlands and ongoing watershed stewardship. The remarkable night-heron inspired these students to take action, and their activism should inspire all of us."





Bob Lewis

Ribbon-tailed-Astrapia.

## SAHUL: A PARADISE FOR BIRDS

BOB LEWIS

LOCATION / DATE

**Berkeley**  
Thursday, July 18  
6:30 p.m. refreshments  
and Annual Membership  
Meeting  
7 p.m. program

Australia, New Guinea and Tasmania are part of the Australian geological plate, or Sahul. After a brief visit to O'Reilly's, a wonderful jungle lodge near Brisbane, Australia, we'll fly to Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea. Our route will take us from the lowlands in the south of the island to the highlands on the western border, and then on to Mount Hagen, a 12,000' extinct volcano. New Guinea has 708 species of birds, 5 endemic families, and the most species of the spectacular Birds of Paradise and fascinating Bowerbirds.

Bob's second career is very avian. He served on the GGAS board where he led the Adult Education Committee. An award-winning photographer and world traveler, he frequently speaks publicly on avian topics at libraries and Audubon Societies. He co-teaches Master Birding, Avian Evolution and Bay Area Birds, and his bird life list stands at 4992. He is hoping to reach 5000 on GGAS' Namibia tour in August.

**San Francisco:** New venue! Sports Basement, 1590 Bryant Street, San Francisco.

**Berkeley:** Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda (between Solano and Marin). Directions: Visit [northbrae.org/contact--find-us.html](http://northbrae.org/contact--find-us.html).

## MIDWAY'S ALBATROSSES

JD BERGERON

LOCATION / DATE

**San Francisco**  
Thursday, August 15  
6:30 p.m. refreshments,  
7 p.m. program

*Please note new San Francisco venue at Sports Basement, 1590 Bryant Street.*

Midway Atoll is the site of the world's largest albatross nesting colony as well as endangered Hawaiian monk seal and Laysan Duck. It is also the home of Wisdom, the oldest known wild bird in the Bird Banding Lab's database. Work conducted by the census team provides vital information to researchers, managers, and conservation groups. The census of Laysan Albatrosses and Black-footed Albatrosses on Midway Atoll provides precise and consistent information regarding nesting albatross.

JD brings a birder's passion, a childlike delight in Nature, and a deep commitment to solving world challenges in unconventional ways to his leadership as Executive Director of International Bird Rescue. He has more than 20 years of experience in not-for-profit leadership, international development and organizational change.



JD Bergeron

## SF ESTUARY SPARTINA REMOVAL AND NATIVE REVEGETATION PROGRAM

MARILYN LATTA

LOCATION / DATE

**Berkeley**  
Thursday, September 19  
6:30 p.m. refreshments,  
7 p.m. program

The San Francisco Estuary Invasive Spartina Project's overarching goal is to eradicate invasive Spartina to enhance overall ecosystem health for tidal salt marsh-dependent fish, migratory birds, and wildlife. Monitoring and treating invasive Spartina is key to protecting native coastal wetland habitat for CA Ridgway's Rail and many other native species in the bay. This presentation will cover the planning and approach to eradicating Spartina while protecting CA Ridgway's Rail and other native species.

Marilyn Latta is a Project Manager at the California State Coastal Conservancy, managing the SF Estuary Invasive Spartina Project, SF Bay Living Shorelines Project, and SF Bay Creosote Removal Projects.





# BIRDATHON 2019: EXPANDING OUR REACH

BY LESLIE WEIR



**G**olden Gate Audubon's popular participatory fundraiser, Birdathon 2019, came to a close after eight months of careful planning and eight weeks of action-packed birding.

After a one-year hiatus, Birdathon returned with a view to attracting birders, non-birders and new birders alike. Some favorite trips returned and many new experiences were added. Birdathon 2019 lasted a full eight weeks to accommodate the added activities with a total of 30 trips, 2 celebratory events, and 6 unique experiences available through our inaugural online auction. Despite threats of heavy snowfall, road closures, and Bay Area spring storms, Birdathon 2019 boasted a total of 521 trip registrations.

But Birdathon is more than great field trips offered by this year's 37 talented leaders. It is also an opportunity for GGAS members to share their passion with friends and family through peer-to-peer fundraising. This year, 21 individuals created personal pages to fundraise for Golden Gate Audubon and Bay Area birds. GGAS member Diane Winkler summed up her experience with a recent email to the office: *"This is the first time I've tried to do a fundraiser. The support I received from my friends warmed my heart to no end. You all do such great work, and I am more than happy to contribute in any way I possibly can."*

Through the efforts of peer-to-peer fundraisers, Birdathon trip leaders, registered participants, corporate sponsors and committee members, Birdathon 2019 raised over \$65,000. Maintaining his championship streak, Dan Harris was the top individual fundraiser for the fourth Birdathon in a row, raising \$4,201 from a total of 62 donors! In a "photo finish," Bob Lewis took second place with \$4,200. Our top fundraisers received vacation trips generously donated by Jenner Inn and Sierra Hot Springs. Bob set a new record by leading four Birdathon trips this year. And, not only was Alex Smolyanskaya our top first-time Birdathon fundraiser, but she also planned and managed our first-ever online auction! For her prize, she received binoculars donated by Out of this World Optics.

Birdathon 2019 closed with a weekend of well-attended events. *Flights of Fancy*, a concert celebrating bird-themed music from the Middle Ages & Renaissance, received rave reviews. The following day, despite the rain that threatened to "dampen" the festivities, attendees at the Birdathon Garden Party Celebration were treated to stunning views of Chabot Regional Park as they sipped bubbly at the beautiful home of board member Carol Baird and Alan Harper. During the party, Golden Gate Audubon honored Beth Huning with a special award for her years of dedication to the conservation of the San Francisco Bay. A longtime conservation professional, Beth served as the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture Coordinator from 2001–2018. Her work has protected wetland and riparian areas crucial for nesting, roosting, and migrating birds of all kinds—especially waterfowl and shorebirds.



Peter Meyer

Top of page: Birdathoners to Pinnacles National Park were treated to close-up overhead views of the resident California Condors (photo by Julie Clark). Above: Enthusiastic Birdathon participants on a trip to Mines Road.



Thank you for joining our donor community.

Donations from March 1, 2019 to May 31, 2019

With gratitude to every individual, business, and organization who made a recent donation. Large or small, the gifts you send support our conservation, education, and member programs and benefit the birds you love.

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### MISSION STATEMENT

Golden Gate Audubon engages people to experience the wonder of birds and to translate that wonder into actions which protect native bird populations and their habitats.

### ABOUT GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON

The Golden Gate Audubon Society was founded January 25, 1917. Golden Gate Audubon Supporting Membership is \$35 per year. You can join or renew on the website or through our Berkeley office.

*The Gull* is published four times per year. Special third-class postage paid in Oakland, CA. Send address changes to the office promptly. The post office does not forward *The Gull*.

Learn about upcoming Golden Gate Audubon events every month! Send your name and email address to ggas@goldengateaudubon.org to receive our monthly e-newsletters with upcoming events and other news.

#### Golden Gate Audubon Society

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[www.goldengateaudubon.org](http://www.goldengateaudubon.org)

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## 2 Birds are Natural Educators

Birds can teach us many things, from geography to history to music and art—and even politics and government studies.

## 4 Speaker Series

July: Sahul – A Paradise for Birds  
August: Midway's Albatrosses  
September: SF Estuary Spartina Removal

## 5 Birdathon 2019

Peer fundraisers, trip leaders, participants, corporate sponsors and committee members raised over \$65,000.

## BACKYARD BIRDER



Peter Meyer

Bullock's Oriole.

## BULLOCK'S ORIOLE

BY CATHY BLEIER

So, which species has turned the most heads on *your* bird walks lately? Hands down, the Bullock's Orioles (*Icterus bullockii*) have evoked the most "Oohs" and "Ahs" on mine since their arrival in April. Fortunately for us, these neotropical migrants will linger to nest in our open woodlands, parks and suburbs.

The male Bullock's Oriole has bright orange underparts, a black eye stripe, and a black bib below its beak. The crown, nape, upper back and tail are black, and it has a large white patch on mostly black wings. The female is pale yellow with a white stomach, unlike the Hooded Oriole, and a greyish back. First year males are simi-

lar to females in coloration but have a bib and eyeline, though less pronounced than the adult. Brightness notwithstanding, you may hear them before you see them, their fast, scratchy monotone chatter being easy to identify. You may also see females singing, a trait shared with other species in the Icterid family.

Bullock's Orioles consume mostly insects, gleaned from trees and shrubs. They also eat flowers and buds, grain, fruit and nectar. Orioles have long, relatively straight beaks with unique muscles that allow them to pierce and forcefully open food (e.g., hanging fruit) or foraging substrates (e.g., bark or soil). This is called "gaping." Some orioles have also learned to use hummingbird feeders and to enjoy a cut orange or two.

For nesting, Bullock's Orioles prefer cottonwoods, sycamores and large willows, but may be found in our Coast Live Oaks, fruit trees or Eucalyptus. The hanging nest is woven with plant fiber, grass, hair and down. The species breeds throughout most of the western states and winters mostly in Mexico and some parts of southwest Arizona. They are "molt migrants," stopping south of their breeding grounds for about two months to molt, and then continuing on to winter grounds, where some take advantage of shade-grown coffee plantations.

The range of the Bullock's Oriole has expanded in some areas and contracted in others, including California, probably due to a combination of factors, such as habitat loss and cowbird introductions. While the species is considered stable for now and its conservation status is "Least Concern," bird lovers can support orioles by planting native flowers and trees and by encouraging neighbors to avoid pesticides and herbicides so that chemical contaminants don't poison the orioles or their young.